

IN HAWAII, OAHU'S MAKUA VALLEY IS A HOT TOPIC. ENVIRONMENTALISTS CLAIM THE ARMY'S LIVE FIRE TRAINING IN THE VALLEY IS PUTTING ENDANGERED SPECIES AND CULTURAL SITES AT RISK. ARMY OFFICIALS SAY THEY TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT WHAT THEY CAN WHERE TROOPS TRAIN ON THE VALLEY FLOOR. AND THEY'VE TAKEN THEIR CONSERVATION EFFORT ONE STEP FURTHER... ENVIRONMENTAL CORRESPONDENT JAVIER HERNANDEZ HAS MORE IN THIS REPORT.

FOR NEARLY A DECADE ENVIRONMENTALISTS AND THE ARMY HAVE ARGUED OVER THE USE OF MAKUA VALLEY, ON THE ISLAND OF OAHU, HAWAII.

"But the environmentalist and the Army do agree on one thing and that's the importance of conserving the valley's natural resources. That's why 22-hundred feet up on the ridge behind me the Army is monitoring and protecting endangered plants."

MOST OF THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN PLANT SPECIES ARE FOUND NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD. AND MOST ARE ENDANGERED OR CONSIDERED THREATENED.

PROBLEMS BEGAN HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO WHEN EUROPEANS ARRIVED. THEY BROUGHT GRAZING ANIMALS AND VERY COMPETITIVE PLANTS THAT STARVED OUT MOST OF THE INDIGENOUS FORESTS.

“ISOLATED ISLAND ECOSYSTEMS, BECAUSE THEY’RE ISOLATED AND USED TO A SLOW RATE OF CHANGE, WHEN YOU BRING IN PEOPLE YOU REALLY ACCELERATE THAT RATE OF CHANGE.”

THE ARMY BIOLOGISTS WORK HARD TO CONTROL NON NATIVE PLANTS WITH PESTICIDES, THEY’VE FENCED OUT GRAZING PIGS AND GOATS AND RAISE NATIVE PLANTS TO RE-VEGETATE THE VALLEY. EVEN THE ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS ARE IMPRESSED WITH THE ARMY’S WORK.

“I MUST GIVE THE ARMY BIOLOGIST CREDIT THEY’VE DONE A WONDERFUL JOB.”

AND WHILE MOST IN HAWAII SUPPORT THE MILITARY’S PRESENCE THE ARMY HOPES ITS CONSERVATION EFFORTS CAN WIN NEW SUPPORTERS.

“I THINK IT’S SOMETHING THAT THE COMMUNITY REALLY SUPPORTS - THE ARMY BEING INVOLVED WITH ENDANGERED PLANT MANAGEMENT - AND SOMETHING THAT I THINK MAKES THE STRONG MILITARY PRESENCE HERE IN HAWAII EVEN MORE WELCOME.”

JAVIER HERNANDEZ, OAHU, HAWAII.